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THE RIGHTEOUS THEN AND NOW

WHEN THE GERMANS occupied France in World War II, historian Jules Isaac was fired from his post as France's Inspector General of Education. Isaac had been a fixture of French intellectual society for decades. His seven-volume *Cours d'histoire* served as the standard history text in most French high schools and universities. Isaac was also a decorated World War I veteran and patriotic Frenchman. While Jules Isaac never denied his Jewish identity, he did not define himself by it.

As the Nazis implemented their "final solution" in France, Isaac turned his historian's mind to the question of anti-Semitism. *How*, he thought, *could the Holocaust be happening in societies that have been Christian for nearly two thousand years?* At first, Isaac managed to maintain his characteristic academic detachment from his subject. But his subject refused to maintain its detachment from Isaac. While he was away from home one day in 1943, the Gestapo arrested Isaac's wife, daughter, son, and son-in-law. Of the four, only his son would return home from the death camps. Before being deported from France, Madame Isaac managed to send a note to her husband exhorting him to, "Save yourself for your work; the world is waiting for it."¹

On the run and in hiding, Jules Isaac devoted himself to fulfilling his wife's last wish. Isaac's writing became to him a "cry of an outraged conscience, of a lacerated heart."² By the war's end, he had completed a six-hundred-page manuscript titled *Jesus and Israel*. In wrestling with the question of how the Holocaust could happen in a Christian Europe, Isaac had reached an unexpected conclusion. While German soldiers serving a neo-pagan Nazi ideology were the ones who carried away his family, Jules Isaac pointed the finger of ultimate blame not at the Nazis, but at the Christian church. He wrote that

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while the German responsibility for the Holocaust was “overwhelming,” it was only a “derivative responsibility.”³ The real culprit, Isaac asserted, was the centuries-old tradition of Christian anti-Semitism. In his words:

Christian anti-Semitism is the powerful, millennial tree, with many and strong roots, onto which all the other varieties of anti-Semitism—even the most antagonistic by nature, even anti-Christian—have come to be grafted in the Christian world.⁴

Isaac traced the source of this Christian anti-Semitism to the church’s traditional teaching on the Jews and Judaism, what Isaac named the “teaching of contempt.” In *Jesus and Israel*, Isaac thoroughly documents and then rebuts this corpus of anti-Jewish beliefs. At the heart of this teaching of contempt was the claim that the Jews “as a whole” had rejected and then crucified Jesus, and that Jesus in turn had rejected and condemned the entire Jewish people. Central also was the church’s uniform denial of Jesus’ Jewish identity and Christianity’s Jewish roots.

Isaac concludes *Jesus and Israel* with the following, haunting statement of his thesis:

The glow of the Auschwitz crematorium is the beacon that lights, that guides all my thoughts. Oh my Jewish brothers, and you as well, my Christian brothers, do you not think that it mingles with another glow, that of the Cross?⁵

ALTHOUGH HE CONDEMNED the Christian teaching of contempt for the Jews, Jules Isaac never condemned Christianity. Despite all he suffered, Isaac persisted in the optimistic belief that if it would only end this teaching of contempt, the church would produce Christians who would save Jews, not kill them. On this point he did not rely upon mere conjecture. For much of the time he was writing *Jesus and Israel*, Jules Isaac was hiding from the Nazis in a Catholic home. His rescuer, a woman named Germaine Bocquet, received her Catholic education from a teacher who had purposely removed anti-Semitism from his lesson plan.⁶ When asked why she risked her life and that of her husband to save the life of a Jew, Germaine Bocquet replied:

The religious education I had received had instilled in me respect for the Jewish people, and gratitude that they have given us the prophets, the Virgin Mary, Christ, and the apostles. Jews were for me people of the Covenant, of God's promises. Jesus, the Messiah, was a faithful son of the Law, which he had come to bring to perfection, not to abolish. I had never heard the Jews spoken of as Christ-killers; I had been taught that our sins crucified Jesus.⁷

Tragically, Mrs. Bocquet's religious education was not the standard catechism in the churches of Europe. While she believed that the Jews were still beloved of God and the beneficiaries of God's holy covenant, the Christian majority embraced the teaching of contempt and a "replacement theology," which held that the church had superceded the Jews as God's chosen people. While Mrs. Bocquet saw the Jews as the family and followers of Christ, most Christians viewed the Jews as the enemies and murderers of Christ. While Mrs. Bocquet risked her life to save a Jew, an entire continent of Christians was killing Jews or standing by and letting it happen. By removing the Jews from God's love, the dominant Christian theology of the day left them vulnerable to man's hate.

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER the Holocaust, the Israeli air force destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak, outside of Baghdad. The Israelis had determined that Iraq was using the reactor to develop a nuclear bomb, a weapon this implacable enemy might one day use against them. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin justified the action to the world by declaring that he would not permit "another Holocaust in the history of the Jewish people."⁸ Israel was universally condemned for the Osirak raid, including by its ally the United States.

In San Antonio, Texas, a pastor named John Hagee was dismayed by the loud outcry against Israel's action. He decided to counter the chorus of criticism with a public show of support. With the help of a fellow pastor and two rabbis, Pastor Hagee organized a "Night to Honor Israel." The day after he held a press conference to announce the upcoming event, someone phoned Pastor Hagee's church and said, "Tell that preacher he'll be dead by Friday."

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As the evening of the event drew near, someone shot out the windows of Pastor Hagee's car while it was parked in front of his house.⁹

The Night to Honor Israel went ahead as scheduled. After the speeches, Hagee presented a \$10,000 check to the president of the local chapter of Hadassah. Then, at 9:27 p.m., Hagee was handed a note. Someone had phoned the *San Antonio Express News* threatening to blow up the auditorium at 9:30 p.m. The room was quickly evacuated.¹⁰

Despite this troubled start, Hagee's Night to Honor Israel became an annual event. Over the years, the size of the crowd grew, and a massive television audience was added. And the checks got bigger. At the 2004 Night to Honor Israel, Pastor Hagee presented checks totaling \$2.25 million to two Jewish organizations that fund the immigration of Jews to Israel and one that supports Israeli orphans.

When asked why he so staunchly supports Israel, Pastor John Hagee speaks of a "biblical mandate to bless the Jews" and of a Christian "debt of gratitude" to the Jewish people. Pastor Hagee notes that:

The Jewish people gave to us the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophets, Elijah, Daniel, Zechariah, etc.—not a Baptist in the bunch. Every word in your Bible was written by Jewish hands. The first family of Christianity, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, were Jewish. Jesus Christ, a Jewish rabbi from Nazareth, made this statement: "Salvation is of the Jews." The point is this: If you take away the Jewish contribution to Christianity, there would be no Christianity.¹¹

If these words are reminiscent of those spoken by Germaine Bocquet, Jules Isaac's rescuer, this is no coincidence. Pastor Hagee and Mrs. Bocquet share the same theology. Like so many of the righteous Gentiles who saved Jews during the Holocaust, Hagee roundly rejects the teaching of contempt and replacement theology; he believes that the Jews are still God's chosen people. When Pastor Hagee looks at Jews, he does not see a rejected people or a deicide people; he sees the family and friends of Christ.

DESPITE THE SIMILARITIES, however, there is one difference between Pastor John Hagee and Germaine Bocquet, and it is a difference of enormous significance.

In her day, Mrs. Bocquet's theology represented the thinking of a small group on the fringes of Christendom—it was the minority report. A generation later, Pastor Hagee's theology represents the dominant strain of Christian thinking in America. Replacement theology is on the decline; its adherents have lost their power and momentum. Christians who embrace the Jews as the elect of God are ascendant both theologically and politically. In twenty-first-century America, the righteous Gentiles have taken over the church.

Today's righteous Gentiles confront a world in which the threats facing the Jewish people have changed but not disappeared. Despite a recent and troubling rise in European anti-Semitism, most Jews in the Christian world no longer live in physical peril and need not seek refuge in Christian homes. Instead, the great existential threat facing the Jews today is the one confronting their Jewish State. Since the day it declared its independence in 1948, Israel has lived under the threat of physical destruction from its Arab neighbors. As Israel's prowess in conventional arms grew, its enemies pursued weapons of mass destruction with sufficient success to ensure that Israel continues to confront annihilation. Since 2000, Israel has been besieged by a new danger in the form of a sustained campaign of suicide bombings by Palestinian terrorists. Israelis, strong and independent in their own land, now face a day-to-day physical danger that once haunted their forebears in Europe.

The modern-day righteous Gentiles exemplified by John Hagee recognize the current threats facing the Jews and have responded to them with an outpouring of support for the Jewish State. Evangelical Christians have become a powerful pro-Israel force in America. In fact, when Republicans hold the balance of power in Washington, evangelical Christians become *the most* powerful pro-Israel force in America. Evangelical leaders speak to the White House and Congress as the representatives of the largest single voting block within the Republican Party. Outside of politics, evangelical Christians raise millions of dollars every year for Israel and for poor Jews around the world. So many Christians visit Israel each year that the Jewish State often receives more Christian tourists than Jewish ones.

Of course, neither lobbying for Israel nor sending checks to the United Jewish Communities qualifies as an act of heroism. While Pastor Hagee and others have taken risks to support Israel, the threats they faced were from a few extremists, not a brutally efficient regime. Referring to Christian Zionists as modern-day righteous Gentiles does not mean that their actions are

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as noble as those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The times do not currently demand sacrifices so sublime from any of Israel's friends, Christian or Jewish. The reference is intended simply to recognize the fact that today's Christian Zionists share the same theology as their heroic forebears, and that they have thus far chosen to act on this theology to the extent demanded by the times. If the Christian Zionists and other friends of Israel do their job properly now, no one may ever need to discover to what heights of heroism they might rise under more exigent circumstances.

WITH LIMITED EXCEPTIONS, the American Jewish community has responded to this epochal change in Christian theology toward the Jews with a collective yawn. For the most part, they simply haven't noticed. Because they have failed to recognize this change, America's Jews persist in assuming that Christian attitudes toward the Jews today are substantially similar to those of prior centuries. It is no wonder, therefore, that so many Jews are suspicious when Christians profess to love them so deeply. When American Jews see a cross, they often see it, as did Jules Isaac, bathed in the glow of the Auschwitz crematorium.

In their failure to recognize radically changed circumstances, American Jews resemble those legendary Japanese soldiers stationed on remote Pacific islands during World War II. Japan surrendered in 1945, and her people went to work building a democracy and a modern economy. Japan rapidly became a major ally and trading partner of the United States. Yet, oblivious to these changes, many of these soldiers continued to prowl the jungles in search of the American enemy.

Many in the American Jewish community are also living in the past, stuck not in Pacific jungles but in European ghettos. In an alternative reality built on traumatic communal memories, millions of Jews continue to crouch, fingers on their triggers, surrounded by bloodthirsty Christians who view them as a replaced, deicide people. Yet the world has changed dramatically in recent decades, and the enemy they fear has long since become a friend. These Jews are fighting ghosts.

In focusing on Isaac's cross, the Jewish community misses Isaac's point. Jules Isaac not only looked back into a dark past, but he also looked forward. He looked forward and saw a door open to him. That door led to the home

of a Catholic woman willing to save his life. Jules Isaac walked through the door, and he survived.

Today, the Jewish community owes it to six million victims to look back into history and remember the evil that was done. But like Jules Isaac, the Jewish community must also look forward. American Jewry must look forward and find that there is a door open to them. The door leads to the churches and homes of millions of Christians who want to stand with the Jews and with their small, embattled State of Israel. It is a door through which they should walk.

TO MANY AMERICAN JEWS, the proposed alliance with evangelicals in support of Israel is a Faustian bargain. They are reluctant to grasp the devil's hand. Their hesitation, they argue, is driven not by past trauma but by present policy.* American Jews, still overwhelmingly liberal, often view evangelical Christians as bitter political opponents. On a series of domestic social issues from abortion to assisted suicide, evangelical Christians champion positions that are anathema to most Jews. Even when it comes to Israel, evangelical Christians often support Israeli policies and politicians that liberal Jews cannot abide.

Here again, the example of Jules Isaac proves instructive. For Isaac, seeking refuge in the home of a Catholic did not require a vow of silence or acquiescence in Catholic teachings to which he objected. He faced no Hobbesian choice between survival and conscience. On the contrary, in the shelter provided by his Catholic rescuer, Jules Isaac wrote a work that placed ultimate responsibility for the Holocaust upon the Catholic Church.

Not only did Isaac criticize the church, but he also changed it. After the war, Isaac dedicated the remaining years of his life to encouraging a Christianity that would reflect his rescuer more than it reflected his tormentors. He worked closely with sympathetic Catholics to draft reforms that would eliminate the teaching of contempt from the Catholic catechism. In his effort to secure adoption of these reforms, Isaac met with a number of Catholic

* The extent to which Jewish communal memories magnify and exacerbate present-day policy differences will be explored in later chapters.

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leaders, including Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII. Isaac's 1960 meeting with Pope John XXIII proved to be historic. Here Isaac persuaded the pope to take steps that culminated in the Vatican's official condemnation of anti-Semitism and the charge of deicide against the Jews.¹² There is thus a direct line from Isaac's writing about the teaching of contempt to the decision by the Catholic Church to end the teaching of contempt.

For American Jews today, joining hands with evangelical Christians will not require ignoring significant policy disagreements. Christian friendship is not being offered at the price of Jewish silence or acquiescence. Each community can continue to pursue its own vision of what is best for America and Israel from within the same tent. While America's Jews may not be able to change Christian politics the way that Jules Isaac changed church doctrine, they may find that collaboration works to blunt differences and foster respect. As Jules Isaac did, American Jews should reach out to their Christian brothers. This time, there is already an outstretched hand waiting to receive theirs.

WHEN THE NAZIS extended their control to a new country, one of their first acts was to require the Jews of that country to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing. The yellow star was part of the process of dehumanization and subjugation. By separating the Jews from their fellow citizens in this fashion, it would be easier to later extract them from the general population and then murder them.

A wonderful story is told about King Christian X, the king of Denmark during World War II. Legend has it that when Hitler ordered Denmark's Jews to wear the yellow star on their clothes, King Christian protested by placing a yellow star on his own jacket. The Jews were fellow Danes, his subjects, and he would not permit such discrimination against them. According to the story, thousands of Danes followed their king's lead, thus thwarting Nazi efforts to single out the Jews.

While the tale is apocryphal, the heroism of the Danes is not. When the Nazis were arranging the deportation of Denmark's seventy-five hundred Jews, their plans were leaked to a few Danish leaders who promptly informed the Jewish community. Almost all Danish Jews went into hiding, and, even-

tually, more than seven thousand of them were ferried to safety in neutral Sweden by a flotilla of Danish fishing vessels. Ordinary Danes provided the hiding places, the boats, and the crew for the transport. When Nazi soldiers visited every Jewish address in Denmark, they found very few Jews at home. King Christian and his subjects wore the yellow star on their hearts if not on their clothing.

Such heroism flowed naturally from a people whose church had never embraced the replacement theology so popular in sibling churches across the border. In the midst of the Danish rescue of the Jews, for instance, the bishop of the Lutheran Church of Denmark proclaimed:

Wherever persecutions are undertaken for racial or religious reasons against the Jews, it is the duty of the Christian Church to raise a protest against it . . . because we shall never be able to forget that the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem, of the virgin Mary into Israel, the people of His possession, according to the promise of God.¹³

Imagine if there would have been more King Christians during World War II. Imagine if there would have been more Germaine Bocquets. Imagine if the majority of Christians in Nazi Europe would have remained true to the Christian message of love instead of the false theology of hate. It may well have been impossible to perpetrate the Holocaust in a Europe so populated.

Today, there is no need for such an exercise of the imagination. Something truly extraordinary is taking place here and now. American Christianity is being taken over by righteous Gentiles. Unlike during the Holocaust, the Jews aren't being abandoned to their fate. Across America, church by church, one by one, Christians are putting on the yellow star. They are standing with the Jews. This time, they are determined not to leave the Jews or their nation, Israel, to fight alone.

The cornerstone of Christian Anti-Semitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that “the old Israel” was written off with the appearance of “the new Israel.” To teach that a people’s mission in God’s providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implication, which murderers will in time spell out.¹

—FRANKLIN LITTELL, 1975

THE RISE OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

WHEN NAPOLEON'S ARMIES conquered Rome in 1809, they entered a city where Jews were forced to wear a yellow star on their clothes, forbidden to eat, drink, or converse with Christians, and were literally locked behind their ghetto walls each night. True to the ideals of the French Revolution, Napoleon opened the gates of the ghetto and granted the Jews full rights of citizenship. It appeared that, for Rome's Jews, the Middle Ages had finally ended.

Such optimism was short lived. After a series of military defeats, Napoleon's regime collapsed in 1814. In the power vacuum that followed, the Vatican regained control of Rome and its neighboring territories and reestablished a Papal State. Upon his return to power, Pope Pius VII reinstated all of the prior restrictions upon the Jews. The Jews were forced back into the ghetto. The Inquisition was revived. Jewish students were expelled from the universities.²

The Vatican's anti-Jewish regime was no sudden paroxysm of hate—it was the culmination of centuries of anti-Jewish edicts and pronouncements. Such church policies toward the Jews flowed directly from church theology regarding the Jews. The Roman church had for centuries embraced replacement theology. In teaching that it had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people, the church asserted a divine rejection of the Jews that opened the door to human imitation. The ghetto followed logically.

THE BIRTH OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

JESUS WAS JEWISH. His disciples were Jewish. In the prevailing Christian view, the Bible was written by forty authors. Of these, thirty-nine were Jewish. The

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fortieth, Luke, was likely a convert to Judaism. None of these earliest Christians believed that they were starting a new religion. They merely sought to spread the news that Jewish prophecy had been fulfilled by the arrival of the Jewish Messiah.

Even when some of the early church fathers began to turn outward and preach the gospel to the Gentiles, they continued to cling to the Jewish roots of their faith. Many early churches required their Gentile members to be circumcised and to observe the full breadth of Jewish law. Jerusalem remained the physical and spiritual center of the nascent church. So long as they viewed themselves as Jewish, Christians continued to embrace the traditional view that the Jews were the beneficiaries of God's covenant with Abraham.

Christians did not continue to view themselves as Jewish for very long. The Christian leaders who believed that the church must follow Jewish law quickly lost the argument to those who believed that such rituals were no longer necessary. Once these barriers were eliminated, the early trickle of Gentile converts quickly grew into a steady stream. As the first century gave way to the second, Christianity became a Gentile religion in which Jews played an ever-declining role.

As this demographic shift took place, a theological one followed. The flow of Gentile converts into the church created a pressure to broaden the covenant beyond one specific bloodline. Some of the church fathers began to assert that the criterion for inclusion in the covenant was not blood but belief: so long as the converts accepted Christ, they became part of the chosen people. Yet this assertion implied a corollary. If faith in Christ was the basis for inclusion within the covenant, then Jewish blood alone was no longer sufficient in the absence of such faith. Indeed, by the mid-second century, this implication was made explicit. The language that had once been used to argue for Gentile *inclusion* within the Abrahamic covenant was increasingly used to argue for Jewish *exclusion* from the covenant.³ Thus replacement theology was born.

The apostle Paul's struggle

The life and teachings of the apostle Paul capture in real time the demographic and theological transformation of the early church into a Gentile institution. Paul (née Saul) was born into a Jewish family in Tarsus, a Roman

province on the southeastern coast of modern-day Turkey, around A.D. 1. A devout Jew, Paul traveled to Jerusalem to study with Rabbi Gamaliel, one of the giants of the rabbinic period, and he became active in the effort to combat the spread of Christian teachings among the Jews. When Christians started making inroads among the Jews of Damascus, Paul set off for that city to fight back.

Then something happened on the road to Damascus. Paul saw a vision of Christ and immediately converted. From that day forward, he redirected his zeal from fighting the church to building it. At a time when most Christians still sought converts from among the Jews, Paul turned outward and devoted himself to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He traveled the Mediterranean world preaching, converting, and building Gentile Christian communities. In addition to personal visits, he pursued his missionary work through letters. From A.D. 51 through A.D. 65 Paul wrote a series of letters to Gentile Christian communities that were later enshrined in the New Testament.

Paul preached an inclusive message to the Gentiles. He argued forcefully against the need for Gentile converts to follow Jewish law. To justify this position, Paul dismissed the importance of the “outward” signs of being Jewish, such as following Jewish ritual or being circumcised “of the flesh.” He instead stressed the importance of being a Jew “inwardly” and of being circumcised “of the heart” through faith in Jesus Christ. After Christ, argued Paul, the old Jewish rituals were merely impediments to the growth of the church.

Paul carried this distinction between the physical and the spiritual over into his interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. He stressed that the Gentiles could, through their faith in Christ, become full participants in God’s covenant with Israel. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul illustrated this point by analogizing God’s covenant with Israel to an olive tree. According to Paul, the Jews were the original branches, many of which were “broken off” due to “unbelief.” The church, he wrote, is a wild olive shoot that was “grafted” into the Jewish olive tree and thereby became “a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree.”⁴

Paul thus opened the Abrahamic covenant to all who believe in Christ without regard to Jewish descent or practice. In so doing, he also laid the rhetorical foundation for Jewish exclusion from the covenant. It was Paul who enshrined the idea that the failure of the Jews to accept Christ was a

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basis for exclusion from the covenant when he referred to the Jews as the original branches of the olive tree that were “broken off” due to “unbelief.” Likewise it was Paul who embraced the concept that blood alone was not a sufficient basis for inclusion in the covenant when he wrote that:

They are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham. . . . those who are children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.⁵

Perhaps anticipating the arguments for Jewish exclusion that could flow from his own words, Paul sought to preserve a special status for his people “of the flesh.” After comparing the church to the wild shoot grafted into the olive tree, he famously cautioned the Gentiles:

Do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.⁶

Paul also invokes his own identity on behalf of the Jews:

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.⁷

He later returns to this theme a third time:

I say then, have they [the Jews] stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! . . . Concerning the gospel they [the Jews] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.⁸

In perhaps the ultimate statement of love for his own Jewish people, Paul states that he wishes he could be “accursed from Christ” so that his brethren “according to the flesh” might be saved.⁹

THERE IS A tension underlying Paul’s defense of the Jews. Such tension is perhaps unavoidable given the task Paul took upon himself of opening the

Abrahamic covenant to all who shared faith in Christ while preserving a special status for the Jewish people.¹⁰ Once faith is made the fundamental criterion for entry into the covenant, the status of Jews lacking such faith is tenuous at best. Christian theology carried within it the seeds of supersessionism from its earliest days.

Paul believed that Christ's Second Coming was imminent. He never envisioned centuries or millennia separating the first and second comings. He likely felt no need, therefore, to find a definitive resolution to the tension between the continued election of the Jews and their rejection of Christ since Christ Himself would soon be on hand to settle the issue.¹¹ When Christ tarried, these tensions were resolved by men with far less tolerance for ambiguity than Paul.

Justin Martyr and full-blown replacement

In the mid-second century, approximately one hundred years after Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, the church abandoned Paul's struggle to preserve a special status for the Jews in favor of a clear and clean replacement theology. By this time, the split between Judaism and Christianity had hardened, and the flow of Jewish converts into Christianity had largely stopped. While there would continue to be Judaizers in the church seeking to bring it back to its Jewish roots, they had lost their hold over the new religion and would never regain it.

The foremost spokesman of this early replacement theology was one of the leading theologians of the period, Justin Martyr. Justin, a Gentile convert to Christianity, lived in various Christian communities around the Mediterranean. As his name indicates, he ultimately met with an untimely end at the hands of the Romans. One of Justin Martyr's most important works was his *Dialogue with Trypho*. Here Justin debates theology with Trypho, a fictional Jewish scholar. In Dialogue 11, Justin claims the mantle of Israel for the church:

We [Christians] have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham who, though uncircumcised, was approved and blessed by God because of his faith and was called the father of many nations.¹²

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In Dialogue 44, Justin makes clear that Christian inclusion is accompanied by Jewish exclusion:

You [Jews] are sadly mistaken if you think that, just because you are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, you will share in the legacy of benefits which God promised would be distributed by Christ.¹³

Finally, in Dialogue 119, Justin expands upon the implications of Jewish replacement:

We Christians are not only a people, but a holy people...nor just any nation...but the chosen people of God...For this is really the nation promised to Abraham by God when He told him He would make him a father of many nations...And we [Christians] shall inherit the Holy Land together with Abraham, receiving our inheritance for all eternity, because by our similar faith we have become children of Abraham... Thus, God promised Abraham a religious and righteous nation of like faith, and a delight to the Father; but it is not you [the Jews] “in whom there is no faith.”¹⁴

To Justin, the dispossession is complete. The Jews—physical Israel—will inherit none of the benefits of the Abrahamic covenants, *not even the physical benefits*. Everything once promised to the Jews, including the land of Israel itself, will now flow to the church.

St. Augustine’s shelter

In 387, a man named Augustine was baptized outside of Rome. “After Constantine, the conversion of Augustine may be the most momentous in the history of the Church.”¹⁵ When the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he made his new faith the official religion of his vast empire. When Augustine converted, he began a career of prolific writing that would make him the most influential Christian thinker of his day. Augustine’s views became the official doctrine of the newly ascendant church.

When it came to the Jews, Augustine embraced replacement theology, declaring the Jews to be “the House of Israel which [God] has cast off.”¹⁶ Augustine thus elevated replacement theology to official church doctrine, where it would remain enshrined for over a millennium and a half. It would

take a tragedy on the scale of the Holocaust to cause the Catholic Church to reexamine this issue.

Yet much like Paul before him, Augustine sought to carve out a special status for the Jews. By Augustine's day, the issue was no longer the abstract one of saving for the Jews a place within God's covenant, but the far more immediate one of saving their lives.¹⁷ With Christianity now the official religion of the Roman Empire, religious minorities throughout the realm faced increasing peril. Christian leaders of the day were already preaching violence against the Jews, and such violence inevitably followed. In 414, a full-scale pogrom occurred in Alexandria, the largest Jewish community in the world at that time. The Jews were expelled from the city and their synagogues destroyed. During this era, pagans and other religious minorities were persecuted into extinction.

It is thus of great significance that Augustine asserted a justification for the continued existence of Jewish communities in Christian lands. Augustine argued that Christians faced a credibility problem. He wrote that the Old Testament is filled with so many clear predictions of the coming of Christ that skeptics would likely dismiss the work as a Christian forgery. However, he asserted, such an argument against the authenticity of the Bible is conclusively rebutted by the fact that this book is preserved by the Jews, the very people who rejected, crucified, and "daily blaspheme" Christ.¹⁸ In this context, the Jewish rejection of Christ becomes a Christian asset. The Jews were witnesses to the truth of Christianity.

For Augustine, the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire both confirmed and enabled their new mission. In his words:

For if they lived with that testimony of the Scriptures only in their own land, and not everywhere, the obvious result would be that the Church, which is everywhere, would not have them available among all nations as witness to the prophecies which were given beforehand concerning Christ.¹⁹

Having found for the Jews a continuing divine mission, Augustine exhorted his followers to spare their lives. In reference to the Jews, Augustine quotes the Psalms, "Do not slay them, lest at some time they forget your Law; scatter them by your might."²⁰ While the exhortation "do not

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slay them” is hardly a warm ecumenical embrace, these words likely enabled Jewish survival in Christian Europe up to the Enlightenment.

AUGUSTINE PLACED DIVINE significance upon the “dispersion” of the Jews. Under a pure interpretation of Augustine’s replacement theology, therefore, the Jews could have been dispersed, but not despised. Yet simpler minds inevitably added to Augustine’s formula a component of degradation. The Jews would serve as a witness to the truth of Christ not only by their dispersion, but also by their suffering in dispersion.

Much like the apostle Paul before him, therefore, Augustine’s effort to preserve a limited status for the Jews contained within it an ambiguity that would elude the masses and the mob. The overriding message of replacement overpowered any subtle caveats placed before it. As Catholic writer James Carroll has noted, “Augustine’s relatively benign attitude toward Jews is rooted in assumptions of supersessionism that would prove to be deadly.” Carroll added that:

For a thousand years, the compulsively repeated pattern would show in bishops and popes protecting Jews—but from expressly Christian mobs that wanted to kill Jews because of what bishops and popes had taught about Jews. Such a teaching that wants it both ways was bound to fail, as would become evident at every point in history when Jews presumed, whether economically or culturally or both, to even think of thriving.²¹

Replacement theology thus evolved, inexorably, into a rationale for persecuting the Jews. Exclusion from God’s covenant led to exclusion from Christian society, and then led, too often, to exclusion from the human family. This shift from *replaced* to *despised* was made most explicitly by a contemporary of Augustine named Saint John Chrysostom.²²

John Chrysostom and anti-Semitic violence

In the year 387, Saint John Chrysostom, the bishop of Antioch, delivered a series of anti-Jewish sermons to his flock. Chrysostom enthusiastically embraced replacement theology and added to it a new and ominous charge. For Justin Martyr and Augustine, the Jews had been replaced because they

lacked faith in Christ. While both men invoked the charge of deicide against the Jews, neither emphasized it. For Chrysostom, however, deicide was the ultimate Jewish crime, and he made it a central plank of replacement theology. Addressing the Jews, Chrysostom asserted:

It is because you killed Christ. It is because you stretched out your hand against the Lord. It is because you shed the precious blood that there is now no restoration, no mercy anymore and no defense. . . . Through your madness against Christ you have committed the ultimate transgression. This is why you are being punished now worse than in the past. . . . If this were not the case God would not have turned his back on you so completely.²³

Having traced the cause of replacement to the bloody crucifixion, Chrysostom calls for bloody retribution. In Chrysostom, the link between *replacement* and *elimination* is made explicit. In one example of his oratory, Chrysostom analogizes the Jews to gluttonous “pigs” who understand only how to “gorge themselves and get drunk.” The analogy thus established, Chrysostom escalates his rhetoric. The foreshadowing is chilling:

When animals have been fattened by having all they want to eat, they get stubborn and hard to manage. . . . When animals are unfit for work, they are marked for slaughter, and this is the very thing which the Jews have experienced. By making themselves unfit for work, they have become ready for slaughter. This is why Christ said, “As for my enemies, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.”²⁴

In a pattern that would tragically repeat itself throughout the centuries that followed, anti-Jewish rhetoric inevitably inspired anti-Jewish action. Chrysostom preached at the close of the fourth century. In the early fifth century there were a series of violent pogroms against the Jews in Chrysostom’s city, Antioch. The great synagogues of the city were destroyed. During this same era, the first recorded charge of ritual murder against the Jews was made in Antioch. These eruptions of anti-Jewish violence continued into the sixth century until the Jews were finally expelled from Antioch altogether.²⁵ So it began.

FOR THE NEXT millennium and a half, up until the twentieth century, Christian treatment of the Jews would alternate between the two poles established by Chrysostom and Augustine in the fourth century. At times, the church embraced Augustine's approach, content to separate the Jews but not murder them. At other times, Augustine's exhortation not to slay the Jews was lost in the anti-Semitic frenzy whipped up by the charge of deicide, blood libels, and other invective. Sometimes permitted to survive, never permitted to thrive, the Jews would spend centuries in Christian Europe clinging to a second-class status in the best of times.

The codification of replacement theology

In 313, the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made his new religion the official religion of the Roman Empire. Overnight, Christianity went from a persecuted religious minority to the state religion of the greatest empire on earth. Christians now had a vast state apparatus and powerful army at their command. This marriage of Christian theology with state power would prove disastrous for the Jews. Replacement theology and the degradation that flowed from it were gradually transformed from abstract theological concepts into the law of the land. In the words of Jules Isaac, "The fate of Israel did not take on a truly inhuman character until the fourth century A.D. with the coming of the Christian Empire."²⁶

Constantine himself initiated the transformation of anti-Semitic doctrine into anti-Semitic law. In 315, the new emperor issued an edict making it a crime for Jews to proselytize. At the Council of Nicaea held in 325, Constantine ordained that the date of the Christian Easter should no longer be linked to that of the Jewish Passover, declaring, "It is unbecoming that on the holiest of festivals we should follow the customs of the Jews; henceforth let us have nothing in common with this odious people."²⁷

Building on what Constantine had started, Christian synods and councils continued to translate replacement theology and related doctrine into the law of the realm. From the Council of Nicaea in 325 up until the Council of Basel in 1434, the church gradually built a legal regime that removed

the Jews from Christian society and locked them behind ghetto walls.* The following are merely the highlights:

- Synod of Clermont (535): Jews are prohibited from holding public office.
- Synod of Orleans (538): Jews are barred from owning Christian slaves or employing Christian servants.
- Synod of Gerona (1078): Jews are obligated to pay taxes for support of the church to the same extent as Christians.
- Third Lateran Council (1179): Jews are prohibited from suing or being witnesses against Christians in the courts.
- Fourth Lateran Council (1215): Jews are required to wear distinctive dress (eventually implemented by means of a yellow badge).
- Council of Oxford (1222): Construction of new synagogues is prohibited.
- Synod of Breslau (1267): Jews are forced to reside in ghettos.
- Synod of Ofen (1279): Christians are prohibited from selling or renting real estate to Jews.
- Council of Basel (1434): Jews are barred from obtaining academic degrees.²⁸

As early as the fourth century John Chrysostom demonstrated that anti-Jewish pronouncements lead inexorably to anti-Jewish violence. Throughout the centuries of these anti-Jewish edicts and legislation, the truth of this tragic law of human nature was proven time and time again. The long history of anti-Semitic violence in Christendom is well known and has been well documented. During these dark centuries, Christian authorities visited upon the

* A few anti-Semitic measures actually predated Constantine. In 306, most notably, Christian leaders meeting at the Synod of Elvira prohibited intermarriage, sexual intercourse, and the sharing of meals between Christians and Jews.

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Jews the organized violence of the Crusades and the Inquisitions, most notoriously that of Spain. Christian leaders also inspired more sporadic violence in the form of countless local pogroms and Easter massacres. In different places and at different times, Jews repeatedly faced the choice of conversion to Christianity or death. Quite often, the option of conversion was not provided.

The Reformation: An opportunity missed

When Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of his church in the early 1500s, he shattered the Catholic Church's monopoly on Christian theology in the West. Out of Luther's critique grew the Protestant Reformation and the rise of new Christian sects freed from the theological control of Rome.

This break from Roman orthodoxy opened the door to a new theology toward the Jews. Yet this was a door through which Martin Luther did not walk. Despite significant theological differences in other areas, Luther and his followers did not challenge Rome's position on the Jews. It took centuries before certain minority Protestant sects would take advantage of their theological freedom to arrive at a different view of the Jews.

Instead of rejecting replacement theology, Martin Luther embraced it and contributed to the rhetorical erosion of Augustine's protective teachings. Some of the most anti-Semitic writings in the history of the Christian church came from Luther's pen. In a work bearing the less-than-subtle title *The Jews and Their Lies*, Luther sets forth a program for dealing with the Jews that foreshadows future tragedy:

First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honor of God and of Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians. . . . Secondly, their homes should be broken down and destroyed. Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught.

Fourthly, their Rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more. . . . Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden the Jews. Let them stay at home. Sixthly, they

ought to be stopped from usury. For this reason, as said before, everything they possess they stole and robbed from us through their usury, for they have no other means of support. Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses as is enjoined upon Adam's children.

If, however, we are afraid that they might harm us personally, or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., then let us apply the same cleverness as the other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., and settle with them for that which they have extorted from us, and after having it divided up fairly let us drive them out of the country for all time.²⁹

Thus the Reformation provided the Jews no shelter from replacement theology and its consequences. Up until the Enlightenment, with limited exceptions, the pattern of anti-Semitic edicts and anti-Semitic acts continued in Protestant lands much as it did in those still under Rome's sway.

THE HOLOCAUST

NAZISM WAS NOT a Christian ideology. Quite to the contrary, Nazism was the antithesis of true Christianity. Christians worship Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who turned the other cheek and willingly went to the cross. The Nazis worshiped blood. They built an altar to their own Aryan blood and upon this altar made millions of human sacrifices. The Nazis rightly recognized true Christianity as an enemy, and thousands of Christian martyrs suffered and died alongside Jews at Nazi hands.

It was modern, neo-pagan Nazism that perpetrated the Holocaust. Yet there is evidence of a Christian core beneath the pagan patina. Christian responsibility for the genocide of Europe's Jews exists at two levels, one historical and one contemporaneous. At the historical level, centuries of Christian anti-Semitism prepared Europe to so readily and enthusiastically embrace Nazi anti-Semitism. For most Europeans, Nazism was merely a new variation on an old and very familiar theme. At the contemporaneous level, the Holocaust was committed by Christians in the heart of Christendom. According to a survey conducted in 1939, 95 percent of Germans belonged to a Christian church.³⁰ None of the many Catholics in the Nazi leadership, including Hitler himself,

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were excommunicated by the Catholic Church during or after the war.³¹ Nazi soldiers were buried in Christian graves.

An honest analysis of the consequences of replacement theology cannot avoid confronting the Holocaust.

The Catholic Church and the Holocaust

Nazism, along with its race-based anti-Semitism, was a relatively new ideology in Europe. Yet this ideology instantly and deeply resonated with the European masses. In searching for an explanation for this rapid adoption, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Nazism flourished in soil fertilized by centuries of Christian replacement theology.

This connection between Christian religious anti-Semitism and Nazi racial anti-Semitism is at its most explicit in the realm of anti-Jewish legislation. Upon coming to power in 1933, the Nazis immediately went to work reversing the Enlightenment and extracting the Jews from Aryan society. One of the first Nazi initiatives was to pass a series of racial laws that reduced the Jews to a separate, degraded existence. As the Nazis conquered neighboring countries, they imposed, or had their puppet regimes adopt, similar racial codes.

In most places in which these anti-Jewish laws were promulgated, they were not revolutionary concepts but merely a return to the legal regime that had only recently been replaced. As historian Raul Hilberg has demonstrated, the anti-Jewish laws passed by the Third Reich and its allies all had clear precedents in church law. Indeed, almost every anti-Semitic provision passed by the various church councils and synods throughout the centuries found new life in Nazi legislation.³² While the Nazi-era laws had a new, racial justification, they fit neatly into a preexisting space in the European imagination.

BEYOND SETTING IDEOLOGICAL and legal precedents, the Catholic Church also played a more direct, real-time role in the Holocaust. The first official action of the Catholic Church toward the new Nazi regime was to recognize it. On July 8, 1933, the Vatican signed the Concordat with Hitler. This agreement was Hitler's first bilateral treaty with a foreign power, and it was for him a significant diplomatic victory. Under this agreement, the Vatican recognized

Hitler's regime and agreed to remove the Catholic Church and the political parties affiliated with it from the political opposition. German bishops were obligated to swear an oath of allegiance to the Nazi state. Throughout the war, even as news of atrocities and genocide made their way into common knowledge, the Vatican never repudiated the Concordat.

The Catholic Church in Germany complied obediently with the role assigned it under the Concordat. Although the church condemned other aspects of Nazi policy, such as the euthanasia of the mentally ill, it never officially protested any of the Nazi policies toward the Jews. On the contrary, Catholic churches actually helped the Nazis to identify Jews by providing them access to church genealogical records. Throughout the war years, even after the fate of deported Jews was common knowledge, these churches continued to share these vital records.³³

When the final solution came to Italy and Rome itself, the church continued its silence. In the fall of 1938, Mussolini's Fascist government adopted a set of anti-Jewish racial laws modeled on the Nuremberg laws. In defending this legislation, the Fascists invoked the clear similarity of this new code with the Catholic Church's traditional anti-Jewish codes. Roberto Farinacci, a member of the Fascist Grand Council, noted that until the French Revolution, all states had excluded "Jews from public offices, from the schools, from university degrees, from exercising professional business positions. All this in harmony with the dispositions sanctioned by the Church through its councils and papal bulls."³⁴

Neither the pope nor any other church authority publicly opposed the Fascist legislation in its declaration or implementation. The Italian government's representative to the Holy See reported back to his government that the new laws "have not, on the whole, found an unfavorable reception at the Vatican."³⁵ When the pope did finally speak out against the legislation, he limited his critique to the application of these laws to Jews who had converted to Catholicism. Catholic converts, argued the pope, were no longer Jews and therefore should not be subject to these restrictions.³⁶ The pope thus objected to the one and only provision of the new laws that went beyond the church's traditional anti-Semitism.

Church acquiescence continued even when the Nazis came to take away Rome's Jews. On October 16, 1943, German SS units rounded up all of Rome's Jews in the central square of the Jewish ghetto. On October 18,

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these prisoners were driven to the train station and loaded onto cattle cars bound for Auschwitz. The journey to Auschwitz that followed was practically a public spectacle.

As the train departed Rome, it was attacked by Allied aircraft seeking to stop it. The attack failed. As the train passed through Padua, in northern Italy, the local bishop saw the condition of the Jews in the cattle cars and begged the pope to take urgent action. When the train reached Vienna, the Vatican was informed that the prisoners were begging for water.³⁷

Five days after the train had set off from Rome, all but 196 of the 1,000 passengers were gassed to death at Auschwitz. Of the 196 admitted to the camp to work, only 15 survived the war. All of the survivors were men, except for one woman. She suffered a fate worse than death as the subject of Dr. Josef Mengele's sadistic medical experiments.³⁸

The pope made no public statement about the roundup and deportation until after most of the Jewish deportees were already dead. When he did speak, his references were veiled and mentioned neither the Jews nor their deaths. He instead lamented "the suffering of all innocents in the war" and the "increased suffering of so many unfortunate people."³⁹

THE VATICAN'S DEFENDERS take exception to the argument that the Catholic Church did not do enough to save Jews during the Holocaust. They note, accurately, that the rolls of the righteous Gentiles are filled with Catholics who risked their lives to save Jews. Among the rescuers were Catholic priests, monks, and nuns who often hid Jews on church property. The pope himself gave refuge to no less than three thousand Italian Jews in his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.⁴⁰ Some of the Vatican's defenders have further argued that the pope needed to maintain his relative silence so as not to jeopardize these ongoing rescue efforts.

Without wading too deeply into this hot controversy, it is sufficient for present purposes to note that even the church's defenders recognize some level of Catholic responsibility. The Catholic Church itself, through its words and deeds, has acknowledged a link between church anti-Semitism and the

Holocaust. The Vatican framed the issue well in its 1998 document, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*:*

But it must be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices embedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecution launched against the Jews by National Socialism when it reached power?

While the Vatican does not directly answer this question in this document, it provides a series of *dots* that can be connected into a tacit acknowledgment of responsibility. The Vatican recognizes that “certain interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people as a whole,” that is, replacement theology, led to discrimination, expulsion, forced conversion, violence, and massacres against the Jews. The Vatican further notes that Christians did not engage in resistance to Nazism that “might have been expected from Christ’s followers.” The document then concludes, “For Christians, this heavy burden of conscience of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence.”

Other church bodies have been less reticent in noting the link between Christian anti-Semitism and Nazi success. In a landmark 1997 statement, the Catholic bishops of France acknowledged that:

In the process which led to the Shoah, we are obliged to admit the role, indirect if not direct, played by commonly held anti-Jewish prejudices, which Christians were guilty of maintaining. . . . In the judgment of historians, it is a well-proven fact that for centuries . . . an anti-Jewish tradition stamped its mark in differing ways on Christian doctrine and teaching, in theology, apologetics, preaching and in the liturgy. It was on such ground that the venomous past of hatred for the Jews was able to flourish. Hence, the heavy inheritance we still bear in our century, with all its consequences, which are so difficult to wipe out. Hence our still open wounds.

* The Vatican here used the Hebrew word for the Holocaust.

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More importantly than its words, the Vatican has recognized the link between replacement theology and the Holocaust in its deeds. Within a generation of the Holocaust, the Vatican officially renounced replacement theology. Even if the reason was not explicitly acknowledged, the timing of such a dramatic theological change speaks volumes.

The church's new approach to the Jewish people was one of the many reforms to emerge from the Second Vatican Council. In 1965, the Council issued a declaration entitled *Nostra Aetate* addressing the church's relationship with non-Christian religions. In this document the Vatican boldly and clearly rejected both replacement theology and the related charge of deicide by pronouncing that:

What happened in His [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from Holy Scriptures.

This document elsewhere notes that “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues . . .” *Nostra Aetate* also reminds believers of the Jewish roots of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles, the early disciples of the church, and the Old Testament. This document invokes Paul's words in Romans by noting that the church “draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.”

The Protestant role

Like the Catholic Church, Protestant churches also bear a historical and contemporaneous responsibility for the Holocaust. Much like the Catholic Church, the major Protestant denominations had embraced and preached replacement theology for centuries. Martin Luther rivaled and quite possibly surpassed John Chrysostom in the vitriol of his anti-Jewish rhetoric. Because the Lutheran church was the major Protestant denomination in Germany, the views of Martin Luther had a particular resonance with Germans. Hitler cited Martin Luther in *Mein Kampf*. Julius Streicher, the publisher of Hitler's newspaper, *Der Stuermer*, quoted Luther in his own defense at the Nuremberg trials.

It was not only the Nazis themselves who invoked Martin Luther to justify their anti-Semitic program. Protestant leaders often echoed the call. After the Kristallnacht anti-Jewish pogroms of November 1938, for example, Bishop Martin Sasse of Thuringia published a compendium of Martin Luther's anti-Semitic writings. In his foreword to the book, Bishop Sasse expressed joy that the Germans were carrying out the program of Luther, whom he referred to as "the greatest anti-Semite of his time, the warner of his people against the Jews." Bishop Sasse noted the happy coincidence that, "On November 10, 1938, on Luther's birthday, the synagogues are burning in Germany."⁴¹

AS HITLER GAINED popularity in Germany, a group of his followers formed a group named the *Deutsche Christen* [German Christians] as the voice of Nazi ideology within Germany's Protestant churches. The German Christians supported removing all things Jewish from Christianity. They proposed that the church end its efforts to proselytize Jews and that all non-Aryans be barred from becoming ministers and teachers. They further advocated the removal of the "Jewish" Old Testament from the Bible.

When Hitler rose to power in 1933, he moved quickly to consolidate his hold over the major institutions in German society, including the churches. Toward this end, Hitler decided to unite Germany's regional Protestant churches into one unified Reich Church. The regional churches agreed to the unification and participated in the July 1933 elections to select delegates to a new national synod. In the run up to the elections, the Nazi party openly supported the German Christian candidates. On election eve, Hitler himself made a nationally broadcasted radio speech in support of the German Christians. On election day, the German Christians won two-thirds of the vote* and gained control of the national synod as well as regional synods throughout Germany.⁴²

The first meeting of the national synod in September 1933 became known as the "brown synod" since so many of the delegates in attendance wore their

* The Nazis had by this point begun to persecute Protestant leaders who opposed the German Christians, no doubt contributing to the German Christian margin of victory.

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brown Nazi uniforms. This synod elected the German Christian candidate Ludwig Muller to the new office of Reich Bishop. The synod also adopted the controversial “Aryan paragraph,” which required that all Protestant pastors and their wives be free of Jewish blood.⁴³

In November 1933, the German Christians held a triumphant rally in Berlin. In a stadium decorated with swastikas and packed with twenty thousand German Christians, the movement’s leaders proclaimed the unity of Christianity and National Socialism. Speakers called for the full implementation of the Aryan clause and the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible. As one speaker reasoned:

If we National Socialists are ashamed to buy a tie from a Jew then we must also rightfully feel ashamed to accept from Jews something that is supposed to speak to our soul, to our innermost religious being.⁴⁴

Even when the German Christians later lost their monopoly over German Protestantism, they continued to be an active and influential force in German society. In 1939, the German Christians held a conference in which they formed an official body known as the “Institute for the Research and Removal of Jewish Influence on the Religious Life of the German People.”⁴⁵ In 1941, Protestant church leaders from seven German regions issued an official proclamation that declared that Jews were not capable of being saved and that they were “born enemies of the world and Germany.” The proclamation urged that the “severest measures against the Jews be adopted and that they be banished from German lands.”⁴⁶ Of all the Protestant bishops of Germany, only one, in a confidential letter to Hitler, protested the slaughter of the Jews.⁴⁷

NOT ALL OF Germany’s Protestants permitted their religion to be hijacked by the Nazis. In 1934, the opponents of the German Christians came together to form the Confessing Church. What united these Protestants was their opposition to government interference in church affairs. Yet while the members of the Confessing Church opposed Nazi interference, not all opposed the Nazis. Many members of the Confessing Church were anti-Semites who had voted for the Nazis or were themselves members of the Nazi party. Many

continued to try to work within the system and never challenged the legitimacy of the Nazi government.⁴⁸

There were some notable members of the Confessing Church, however, whose opposition to government interference in church affairs led them into open opposition to the Nazi regime. Martin Niemöller, one of the founders of the Confessing Church, began to preach against the Nazi regime from his pulpit. Hitler arrested him in 1937, and he spent the next eight years in concentration camps. Another leader of the Confessing Church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, participated in the German resistance and helped smuggle a group of Jews out of Germany. Bonhoeffer was caught and hanged by the Nazis in 1945.

MUCH LIKE THE Catholic Church, the Protestant world has through its actions recognized the connection between replacement theology and the horror of the Holocaust. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, most major Protestant denominations have adopted resolutions clearly renouncing this teaching.

Given its proximity to the epicenter, it is not surprising that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany took the lead in charting a new theological course. In 1950, the church leadership declared that “God’s promise is valid for his Chosen People, even after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹ The American Lutheran Church followed suit later, along with most of the major Protestant denominations in America.

While most of these church resolutions were silent as to the reasons for the change, others made the motive explicit. The Presbyterian Church, for example, noted the following when it rejected replacement theology in 1987:

It is agonizing to discover that the church’s teaching of contempt [for the Jews] was a major ingredient that made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews by Nazi Germany.⁵⁰

FOR MORE THAN fifteen hundred years, the Christian churches of Europe taught that when the Jews rejected Christ, the church replaced them as the true Israel and the beneficiaries of God's promises to Abraham. Once the church achieved temporal power in the fourth century, replacement theologians replicated God's rejection in their realms. As if needing to constantly confirm the truth of replacement, successive Christian generations degraded, persecuted, and murdered the Jews. An exiled, reviled people became living proof that God had embraced a new partner in covenant.

Even when the Enlightenment ended the church's political and spiritual monopoly over Europe, replacement theology's influence continued unabated. Hitler inherited an ideological infrastructure and minds open to his message when he put forth an anti-Semitic program that was new only in its underlying rationale. Hitler's debt to replacement theology was deep.

What if the church had preached a different message? What if Christianity's consistent message had been that God loved and would never forsake the Jewish people? What if week after week for century after century Europe's priests and pastors had preached to their flocks that he who blesses the Jews will be blessed, and he who curses the Jews will be cursed? What if they had rejected the deicide charge and had instead taught that Christians owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Jews for providing their Messiah, their apostles, and their Holy Bible? Could such Christians have systematically excluded Jews from society and locked them in ghettos? Could such Christians have murdered Jews in the belief that they were furthering God's will? Could a Europe so schooled have perpetrated a Holocaust?

Any answer to these questions would be pure conjecture. Yet it is possible to make the guess more educated, to grasp what could have been, by examining the behavior of those Christians who have rejected replacement theology. Today, Christians who reject replacement theology are in the ascendance and dominate American evangelical Christianity. It is to these Christians, and a sunnier chapter, that we now turn.